

# Minute-taking

*A short manual*

## Minute-taking for beginners

A Citizens Advice Scotland bite-sized e-learning module

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### Contents

Above is the contents page of a minute-taking manual found on the Internet at:

[http://www.caslearning.org.uk/eLearningContent/elearning\\_content/biteSized/Minute%20taking.pdf](http://www.caslearning.org.uk/eLearningContent/elearning_content/biteSized/Minute%20taking.pdf)

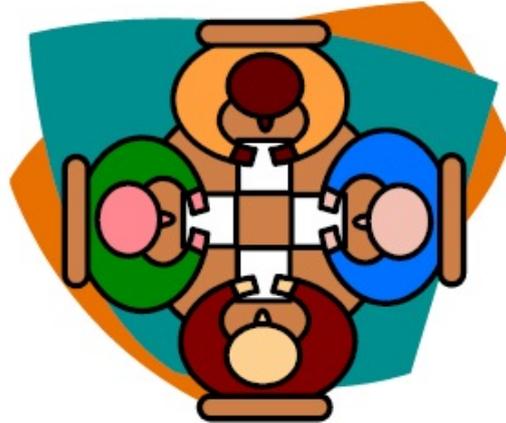
This “Citizens Advice Scotland” manual is a useful, 44-page, interactive, 3.5 MB PDF file. Some may wish to download and use it. But it is too big a file for our CU purposes. Nor will we follow the above contents page.

Instead, our booklet samples some of the highlights of the “Citizens Advice Scotland” booklet, using them as a trigger for our own observations in this 8-page booklet.

## Reasons for meetings

Business meetings may be held to:

- brief and inform people
- gather views and opinions
- make decisions
- solve problems
- plan activities
- review activities



### Meetings are for a purpose

Minutes are held to assist in the achievement of a purpose, whatever it may be.

Meetings are also very costly.

Each person attending represents “opportunity cost”, i.e. time used up that could have been spent on other things. If this is calculated at the rate at which people are paid, it can be found to add up to a large amount in money terms.

The cost of the meeting is this total of all the “opportunity costs”, plus the actual costs of preparation, transport, catering, and accommodation. The preparation and distribution of the minutes is not the least of these costs.

Minutes are supposed to harvest the product of the meeting and preserve it.

It will help the minute-taker if he or she has a good idea of the prior aims of the meeting, as well as sensitivity to creative developments that may occur. A meeting is not only held to formalise previous conceptions, but to work on them, and to improve them. If not recorded, all this work and expense will be in vain.

## Why we record meetings

We may record meetings to:

- remember what actions were agreed
- remember who agreed to do what
- remember the timescales involved
- outline what was discussed for those who were unable to attend
- explain the reason why a course of action was taken, when looking back later on.



## **Publication!**

The “Citizens Advice Scotland” booklet misses out on the most crucial aspect of minute-taking. This is the publication of the minutes, which, if it does not happen effectively will mean that all the effort put into the minutes will be wasted, and the meeting, too, will have been wasted.

A plan of publication will influence the form that the minutes take; in other words, the minutes should be prepared with a view to publication.

The days are long gone since minutes were hand-written in a book, passed and signed as a true record, and kept in a safe place by the secretary. Nowadays, minutes are circulated in hard-copy and in electronic form, by e-mail. Minutes are circulated as soon as they can be produced, and before they are passed as a true record, which normally only happens at the next meeting of the body or structure.

If the minutes are not circulated, it will be found that allocated tasks are not done, until after the subsequent meeting, which is never the intention.

The best plan, for a monthly meeting of a structure, is to circulate minutes within one week, and then to send out a reminder one week prior to the next meeting. Within this overall pattern, the minutes will be understood as a communication and an essential link in a chain of communication which includes the meeting, and the work of the organisation between meetings, including executive and sub-committee meetings that need to be informed of the decisions of the main meeting.

## What kind of meeting is it?

- Some meetings are more formal than others.
- To start with, you may be asked to note an informal meeting like a volunteers' meeting or working group.
- It may be helpful to check with the person who asked you to take minutes what style of minutes are customary for that particular meeting. Also, look at the minutes of the previous meeting.
- Procedures for management committee meetings are laid down more formally.

**Yes:** But try to leave a clear record, in any case.

## What to bring

Here are some things to bring to the meeting:

- expenses forms and pens (if required)
- name cards (if required)
- list of apologies in case the Chair asks you to read these out
- copies of the agenda and minutes of the previous meeting
- copies of supporting papers
- either some note paper or a laptop
- your diary or electronic calendar so as to note the date of the next meeting



This may be an adequate list. The first two items may or may not apply, but the other items will nearly always have to be brought to any kind of meeting.

## What to listen for

When taking minutes of a business meeting, the most important thing to listen for is:



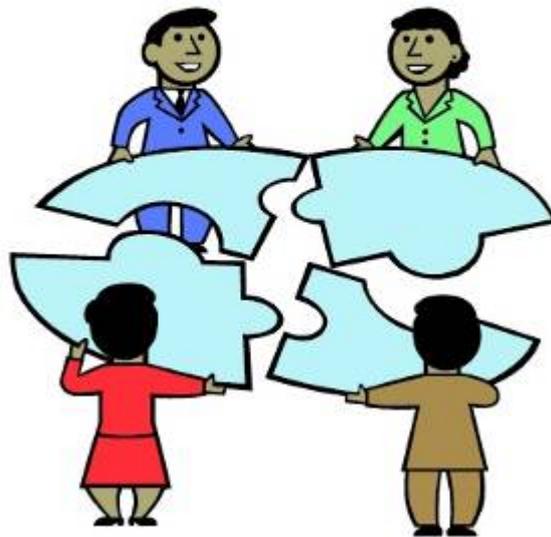
# decisions

To record decisions is the most important thing. A good term to use is: **“Agreed...”**.

## What is a decision?

A decision is an agreement on action to be taken and covers:

- who... will do...
- what (exactly)
- when
- where
- and sometimes how they will do it and the resources or support they will need



## Decisions, decisions

The quality of minutes will be judged by the extent to which decisions are completely and clearly described.

A good minute taker, one who is aware of what a decision should look like, is going to be more likely to write clear decisions that are complete, and not ambiguous.

## Agenda

If you are lucky, the Chairperson will announce all decisions in a clear way before moving on to the next item.

It is more likely that some of the decisions will not be announced formally in this way. So, if you are in doubt, then a good option is:

### Help from the Chair

One option in that situation is to ask the Chair of the meeting to summarise.



Ask the chairperson to tell you what the decision is.

If there is a clear agenda, the minute-taker will know better what decisions are expected to be recorded. The agenda may begin with Opening, Apologies, Minutes of the Previous Meeting, Approval of the Agenda, and perhaps the singing of an appropriate song. It may end with Announcements and Date of Next Meeting.

In between such standard items that may well be the same from one meeting to another, there will be one or several items that are the special purpose of the particular meeting, and these are where the main decisions will be taken.

If there is a speech and/or a generalised discussion of an educational nature with no result that can be called a decision, requiring action, then the minute-taker need only to record that such a discussion took place, noting appropriate but not elaborate details.

# The ABCs of minute-taking

Effective minutes are:

- **Accurate**
- **Brief**
- **Clear**

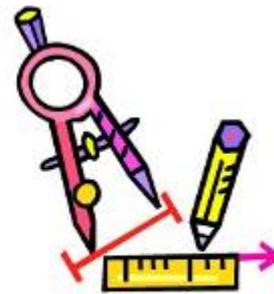


**Absolutely:** Accurate, Brief, and Clear

## **Accurate**

A 'true and accurate record' will include:

- time, place and duration of the meeting
- who was present and who gave apologies
- what was decided, when it has to be done by and who will do it (this is normally put in an '**action list**' at the end)
- a brief summary of what was discussed
- who proposed and seconded any motions, and who requested that their dissenting views be noted
- facts are accurate – eg titles of documents and organisations and any financial figures.



## **How brief?**

Think about the number of sheets of paper. If the meeting can be recorded on one or two sides of an A4 sheet of paper, that will be very convenient for all concerned. Minutes can also be done in booklet form.

## Action lists

It is helpful for minutes to include a list of actions at the end, summarising who will do what and when.

A table can be a useful way to present this information.

The action list from the previous meeting is often reviewed at the start of the next one so that members can see how matters are progressing.



Don't forget to remind the Chairperson: **Fix the date of the next meeting!**